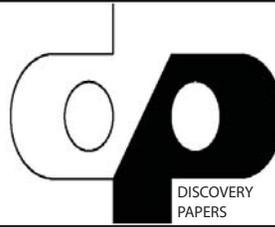


PRECIOUS AND VERY GREAT PROMISES

SERIES: IMMORTAL. INVISIBLE.



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2 Peter 1:3–21
5th Message
Steve Zeisler
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2 Peter 1:3–21

In the current sermon series we aim to grow in faith, expanding our vision of the invisible and sovereign God (Hebrews 11:1). The topic for consideration in this message is the nature of scripture.

In Matthew 24:35 the Lord said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” My words, does not refer only to the quotes of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. All inspired Scripture is his message—stories, songs, parables, genealogies, dreams, letters, and laws. For Muslims, the Koran is an independently holy object. For Christians the Bible is revered because of the One who breathed it into existence and because it is filled with his truth. ‘My words’, declared Jesus. We worship him and therefore submit to Scripture.

In the modern world, however, any assertion that a statement can last forever is immediately suspect. For many of our contemporaries, all language is temporary, and the latest news is considered more important than lasting truth. Fleeting experience counts for more than study of the word.

In the eyes of secular academics beliefs and values are always socially constructed. No statement can claim lasting authority and religious texts are the most dubious of all. They were written, we are told, to entrench privilege; to give the strong power over the weak. The Bible’s difficult statements—accounts of suffering, mysteries and paradoxes—are also seized upon in efforts to prove that Scripture is inadequate. Unfortunately, simplistic pronouncements, hypocrisy, and big egos displayed by prominent Christians have made the Bible seem even more unbelievable to outsiders.

We must acknowledge difficulties and answer objections with humility. But we also need to be sure of this: the Lord God, master of heaven and earth, has aligned himself with his word and it remains the doorway to eternal life.

What, then, does the Bible teach us about itself? We turn to 2 Peter Chapter 1 where the apostle uses three terms: promise, prophecy, and writings. In this context they each refer to the entire Bible, not a sub-section of the whole.

2 Peter 1:4:

He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

We immediately encounter love language—vows uttered by God. I won’t forget the occasions when two of our grandchildren were adopted. Each time we were in a courtroom before a judge robed in black. Our daughter and son-in-law promised (precious, very great promises) with solemnity and joy, in the presence of family and friends, to nurture and love their children throughout their lives. In a similar vein, the Bible is not first and foremost an informational document. It is centered on God’s solemn, heartfelt, and unbreakable promises to make us like himself and rescue us from a corrupt world.

Skipping a section on our responsibilities as recipients of these promises, we jump down to 2 Peter 1:19. Here we have further discussion of the nature of the Bible, including how it came into being.

2 Peter 1:19-21

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The written word is pictured as a *lamp shining in the dark*. We note first how Peter regards our present tragic condition. The created world, once bright and beautiful has been plunged into darkness. But only for a time. The day is coming and Scripture serves as a lamp to guide us until the dawn.

In these verses we are also told how a text is inspired by God, starting with a negative observation. The Bible is not a product of human wisdom which finally rises to a meet a divine standard. It is not the best efforts of the smartest people.

Rather, Scripture originates with the initiative of the Holy Spirit. He chooses an author with a particular personality, vocabulary, access to source documents, and life history, and then causes that person to declare divinely inspired words. The different human authors create the differences in literary style and personal perspective we find among the books of the Bible. The inspiration of the Spirit grants them all divine authority.

And the guidance of the Spirit is essential if readers are to meet the living God in the pages of Bible. I remember a bumper sticker, though I haven't seen it for some time, which stated, "The Bible says it –I believe it –that settles it." Not so. The text by itself, unilluminated by the Spirit, is not enough. Human agency did not establish the Bible as God's word, and we cannot gain life from it without humble dependence on the Lord.

My mother died four years ago this week and she has been a bit on my mind. Mom left behind a book, *Grandma Z's Recipes*. It is filled with her sense of humor, and her convictions about the importance of family meals and leisurely table fellowship. She loved her children and grandchildren and saw the best in us. *Grandma Z's Recipes* will serve as a good set of recipes for anyone who reads it, but it means the world to me because of the one who wrote it. Similarly, the Bible has some value as a book among other books. But it is a life-giving treasure for those who encounter the author in its pages.

Consider the message of **Psalm 1:1-4** and its vision of drawing life from the word (law) of the Lord:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴The wicked are not so, but they're like the chaff that the wind drives away.

A tree planted by a stream has everything it needs, despite the challenges caused by drought. A well-rooted man or woman drawing on the elixir of God's word can bear the heat of hard circumstances. Those without such roots are like chaff, cracked and dissipated by life's difficulties. They have nothing substantial to cling to.

Also, we should remember that God's truth is a gift that is meant to be passed on to others. Isaiah says, "The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary" (Isaiah 50:4). The world is filled with sorrow and pain for which the Gospel is the antidote. We receive blessing from scripture in order to give away what we have learned to those who are weary.

I want to conclude with four admonitions, and then with a warning.

First: read the Bible regularly. There are many good helps available for structured bible reading and guides for resisting life's demands in order to make time for God's word. We know that parents who regularly read to young children at bedtime are sometimes rewarded with spontaneous conversations-from-the-heart with their little ones. Similarly, routine Bible reading can, without warning, expand to an intimate, even life-altering encounter with the Lord.

Second: study the Bible. In addition to regular Bible reading, believers who work at getting beneath the surface will reap a reward. Because we have differing gifts and backgrounds, study methods and approaches will vary from person to person. But all of us can go deeper in understanding the Word of God. There are a vast number of available resources in print and online: classes, commentaries, study tools, sermons, podcasts, and more. Determine to take your next step in becoming a student of Scripture.

Third: discuss the Word with others. A fellowship group thrives when it makes time for God to speak through his Word. Each of us has an insight or emphasis that can be a blessing to others, especially when offered in a circle of friends.

Fourth: gather for Scripture-infused community worship. The songs, sermons, silences, prayers, and plans that make up weekly worship services should be shaped by the Word. God's truth is both creative and profound. It keeps regular gatherings from becoming stale, and it keeps them from being taken over by fleeting passions that focus on merely human gifts.

In conclusion: a warning. Jesus said, "If anyone has ears to hear let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). And later, "For the one who has, more will be given; . . . from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Matthew 13:12).

Our lives in Christ are never static. We either continue to listen and grow or stop our ears and risk forfeiting what we once had. Consider language retention: immersed in English-only settings, second generation immigrants often lose the language of their parents even though they once spoke it fluently. I have friends who were on fire for the Lord during college years who have walked a long distance from Christ as adults.

Amos prophesied in **Amos 8:11-12**:

'Behold the days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. ¹²They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

It is easy to become sated by spiritual junk food, distracted by side-shows, and deafened by false promises. Without 'ears to hear' the compelling beauty of God's word fades into the distance and its music grows faint. It becomes ever easier to go with the flow than to make time for One who loves us most.

The witness of senior saints can shake us awake. We heard testimony today of a sister whose love for God's word has not dimmed in 80 years. Those who follow her example will never know spiritual famine, will never seek for a word from the Lord that they cannot find. May we follow such a path.